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ABSTRACT

Informed observers, from the political right to the left, believe that citizen education requires reform. While its effects on public life may be unclear, democratic theory insists that education is required as a condition of democracy itself. Most often, students are given information about the founding of the government, its structure, and due process of law. Reformers advocate instruction concentrated on moral reasoning, public controversy, global interdependence, and cultural pluralism. Student participation in community service, political action, and school governance have also been proposed. Both mainstream and reform programs have failed because (1) citizen education receives low priority, (2) the curriculum offers inadequate attention to issues central to democratic citizenship, and (3) reform plans have not included teachers in the planning process. This analysis addresses the central issues neglected in both traditional and reform programs. Three orientations of citizenship education are discussed: cultural induction, emancipation, and the hidden curriculum of cynical realism. Thoughtful citizens need help dealing with the following issues: pluralism, distributive justice, individual interests and collective responsibility, and meaningful participation. Direct experience is necessary to motivate students and maximize retention and transfer, and participation is also a valuable source of citizenship knowledge. Reform initiatives should include teachers and must address those fundamental issues of modern U.S. citizenship that are neglected in educational programs. Education must rely on direct student experience and concentrate on issues such as pluralism, distributive justice, and meaningful participation. (GEA)

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I What is the "problem" of citizenship education in the US?

Informed observers, from the political right to the left, think citizen education needs reform, but why all the fuss? From a functionalist perspective, and in spite of disappointment with the civic understanding and participation displayed by youth and adults, the US system of democratic governance works remarkably well. Institutions carry on with their work, citizens generally pay taxes, obey the laws; political leadership changes without violence or social instability, and compared to other nations, due process of law and civil liberties are respected. This is not to endorse all outcomes of the political-economic system. Public life is scarred by indignities and injustices, particularly the oppression of minorities and the poor, destruction of the natural environment, drug dependency, crime, and public officials who violate the public trust. Whether such problems can be attributed to deficiencies in citizen education, however, and whether their solution rests with improved citizen education in schools, is an open question.

The actual effects of citizen education on public life may be unclear, but democratic theory insists that education in a certain vein is required as a condition of democracy itself. Democracy assumes a citizenry committed to liberty, equality and the common good, with an understanding that the state exists to secure individual rights and collective well-being, that governments must be run through consent and participation, and that the advancement of these purposes requires broad access to information relevant to public affairs. Evidence from a variety of sources, however, indicates that large numbers of citizens lack the implied commitments, understandings, and skills. If, by definition, democracy demands a citizenry educated along these lines, then shortcomings on these matters justify efforts to improve citizen education.

The prevailing approach has been to give students information about the founding of the US government, the structure of the Federal system, checks and balances on the authority of the state, procedures to maximize consent of the governed and due process of law. Reformers advocate instruction concentrated more on moral reasoning, public controversy, the legal system, economics, global interdependence, cultural pluralism. Increased student participation in community service, political action and school governance have also been proposed and tried.

Both mainstream and reform programs have failed, for three main reasons. (1) Compared to other goals of education, in practice we refuse to place citizen education as a high priority. (2) The curriculum offers inadequate attention to issues central to democratic citizenship in a mass, modern society, and it denies students the

opportunity to confront these issues through experience. (3) Finally, even those reforms that have addressed these issues have been impotent, because they have issued pronouncements, programs, and texts without developing ownership among those who must shoulder the major educational responsibility - the teachers.

The problems are interrelated, and each is critical, but this analysis addresses only the second: central issues neglected in both traditional and reform programs. The point is not to prescribe a new curriculum, but to identify issues whose neglect in the teaching of history, civics, social studies and social science has often rendered citizenship education a hollow enterprise. Unless new curricula grow out of analysis of issues such as those below, we will continue to miss the mark.

II General Orientations

An assumed consensus about the requirements of democratic citizenship actually harbors three conflicting orientations. Often they are not articulated precisely in this language and they may be taught in combination. But since they represent persisting contradictions, they should be debated as we set the more specific values, knowledge and skills to be taught.

A. Cultural Induction. The emphasis here is to establish a bond between the student and the dominant political culture, that is, to develop an informed sense of the legitimacy of democratic institutions, knowledge of how the system works, and the commitment and the skills to participate within existing channels. Induction (socialization) can be pursued through indoctrination, but also through reflective study. This is the orientation traditionally represented in civics texts and in proposals from governing elites.

B. Emancipation. This position seeks to develop a sufficiently critical awareness of society so that students make informed choices about the extent to which they subscribe to culturally dominant norms and institutions. Ultimately, to question the validity of existing institutions and to build individual and collective empowerment is more important than functioning successfully within current structures. This orientation has been advocated as a radical, minority position, but it also has credence among advocates of critical thinking in civic education.

C. The Hidden Curriculum of Cynical Realism. Too heretical to advocate explicitly, this orientation is taught implicitly, largely through off-hand comments of teachers and other adults. The message is that democratic institutions are designed to serve laudable ideals of

liberty, equality and human dignity, for reasons such as human greed, incompetence, bureaucratic rigidity, economic structures, the ideals are consistently violated. Realizing that average citizens are not likely to make significant progress toward fulfilling the ideals, citizens must accept with resignation an imperfect system.

Whether we teach the Constitution, the electoral process, or policies for reducing poverty, one or more of these orientations is likely to be conveyed. Can democratic citizenship be well-served by continuing to teach contradictory perspectives? Which orientation is most likely to enhance democratic citizenship? If there is some value in each, how might they be combined without serious contradiction? If we address these orientations explicitly, we might reduce the confusion that repels student interest in citizenship.

III Substantive Issues in the Teaching of Citizenship

The debate on general orientations should be grounded in analysis of the nature of contemporary citizenship. Due to advanced technology, the concentration of economic power, and cultural pluralism, the tasks of citizenship have changed substantially from those implied by the image of the Greek polis or New England town meeting. Unfortunately, however, knowledge of citizenship, in contrast to subjects such as history or physics, has not been accumulated into an intellectual discipline with a well-defined knowledge base. Political philosophy, history, social science and other fields contribute importantly to our understanding of citizenship, but we know relatively little about the practice of citizenship in diverse modern contexts. The thoughtful citizen needs help in dealing with the following persistent issues.

A. Pluralism

Maintaining a functioning community and working toward the public good has been complicated enormously by the increasing diversity among citizens. The white Anglo-Saxon tradition that has dominated so much of the public culture faces an escalating host of alternatives from diverse European peoples and from Hispanic, Asian, African, and Middle-Eastern cultures. Important differences in socio-economic status, age, gender, and family structure add further dimensions to the challenge of pluralism.

Lip-service to the principle of tolerance is not sufficient for dealing with three basic problems. First, a philosophical-ethical problem: If all people are to be treated with equal respect, whose values should prevail in cases of conflict? A strong case can be made against ethical relativism, but how to establish the values that ought to prevail in particular situations remains problematic. Second, a human

relations problem: How to develop in students empathy or respect for groups perceived as fundamentally different, when the students have either no personal contact or negative personal experiences with members of the out-group? Third, a social-political problem: What particular traditions and histories should comprise the foundation for cultural cohesion or bonding to the body politic, and how much differentiation is appropriate? In spite of recent efforts to develop a strong national "core" curriculum of US History, for example, it is likely that different groups of students (e.g. poor people of color vs affluent whites) would need different forms of citizenship education to participate productively in public life.

B. Distributive Justice.

Who gets what, when, how and why, or the "authoritative allocation of values" is the basis of politics, government, and the state. Issues of civic life thereby arise primarily from conflicts over the distribution of goods, services, power and opportunities. Distributive justice touches many needs, but most obvious is material well-being: food, shelter, health care, safety. In an economy where these depend largely upon personal income, the distribution of income then becomes paramount, and as income itself depends upon other opportunities (e.g. child care, formal education, and employment), the distribution of these services constitutes, in large measure, the common good.

If citizens are to make informed judgments about individual and group welfare, they must study how political, economic, social, and ethical systems allocate material resources, cultural opportunities and power. The subject is treated only superficially in history, civics and economics courses, and usually the existing economic-political system is portrayed uncritically as the most desirable. But citizens across the range of economic groups continuously raise issues of distributive justice. Unless we study more carefully the nature and fairness of existing patterns, and possible alternatives for addressing inequities, we will continue to neglect a fundamental civic issue.

C. Individual Interests and Collective Responsibility.

Is the main goal of democracy to create a society of autonomous individuals each pursuing self-interest who observe rules of fairness so as not to infringe on the self-interests of others? Does democracy also entail collective responsibility beyond avoidance of trespass upon others; for example, to forego certain individual interests in order to care for others and for the planet? The tension between individual freedom and collective responsibility has been studied in depth, although it is rarely considered in schools. What is relatively new in modern, culturally pluralistic societies, is citizen membership in <u>multiple</u> collectives (family, church, ethnic group, workplace, city,

state, nation, world) whose activities, goals and responsibilities cannot all be pursued by the individual citizen. In balancing individual interests with the common good, how are the primary arenas of collective responsibility to be defined, especially when they may involve conflicting loyalties and when the dynamics of international interdependence increasingly suggest the need to ground collective identity in a global community?

D. Meaningful Participation.

The textbook version of democratic citizenship holds out the promise of citizens influencing government through a representative system, with the right to elect leaders, to petition the government, to participate in lobbying, protest, and campaign activities. Why does the vast majority of citizens consistently refuse to participate regularly in any of these activities? The size of most political jurisdictions, the maze of bureaucracy, the technicalities of modern issues, and the lack of leisure time to participate - especially for the poor - make comprehension and participation difficult. What, if any, are the tasks of citizenship beyond keeping informed of the news and voting, and can these bring any meaningful sense of empowerment to citizens?

There are no easy answers, but it may be helpful to distinguish between citizen participation at two levels. Through "societal" participation, we influence larger institutions by affiliating with interest groups who muster expertise and resources to deal with distant bureaucracies and centralized power. Personal efficacy here is experienced only indirectly through the knowledge that one makes a contribution to an abstract collective effort. A second level of participation is involvement in local face-to-face groups such as neighborhoods, churches, schools, voluntary associations, and in some cases, local units of government. Self-governance in these "communal" contexts approximates more closely the town meeting form of direct democracy. The point is not to choose one form over another, but to recognize that the textbook image of democratic participation has little credence and to study the possibilities of new, more meaningful expressions of consent of the governed.

IV Learning Citizenship Through Practice

Disciplined study of the issues above is badly needed, but, this must be informed by efforts to practice citizenship. Direct experience is necessary to motivate students and to maximize retention and transfer, but participation is also a valuable source of knowledge of the subject itself. As indicated above, we have little authoritative knowledge on how to participate productively in self-governance, dispute resolution, and the formation of public policy. Thus, we need the experience of

students and others as "content" for study. Citizenship should become a laboratory subject where mastery is built in part through formal study of previously accumulated knowledge, but also through reflection upon one's interaction with the real "materials" (issues, people, situations) of civic life.

Successful programs have been developed for many citizenship tasks. Community service programs offer opportunities to assist others in nursing homes, hospitals, day care centers, schools, and other service agencies. Mock trials, the model United Nations, and other simulations, provide training in dispute resolution, political compromise, complex decision-making. Systems for student government which give students real opportunity to exercise power in conjunction with faculty and the school administration offer legislative, executive, and judicial experience, coupled with public responsibility for collective decisions. Finally, student involvement in political campaigns and social advocacy in the community beyond the school nurture skills of adult interaction and coping with the satisfactions and frustrations working toward the public good. To succeed in these activities, students must often gain substantial knowledge about specific issues and institutions, they must communicate effectively orally and in writing, and they must accept personal responsibility for their actions.

The feasibility and success of these programs has been documented. They have empowered and educated students at minimal cost and without major negative consequences. The concerns of many that such programs detract from education for basic skills and that they entail insurmountable logistical obstacles have been addressed, but few schools have adopted them. The persuasive rationale for these programs and their success lead one to conclude that the schools' reluctance is probably grounded in a more fundamental objection to education for active citizenship. Of course, experiential learning alone is not the answer, but without such opportunities, other efforts to revive civic learning will at best waste the time of students and teachers; at worst they will increase cynicism and disinterest in public life.

V Conclusion

This analysis began with the claim that citizenship education in schools has failed to empower most of us to participate productively in civic life and that reforms such as newly required civics courses or standardized exams on the Constitution offer no solution. Instead, substantial rethinking of the enterprise is needed, beginning with the identification of fundamental issues of citizenship in the modern United States but neglected in educational programs. We need more explicit deliberation of competing general orientations: cultural

induction, emancipation, and cynical realism. Whatever content may be included in the curriculum, we must concentrate more on the central issues of pluralism, distributive justice, individual interests and collective responsibility, and meaningful participation. Finally, the study of citizenship must rely significantly upon laboratory experience and direct practice. This position statement builds on previous work in the field, but it is only a beginning. It will lead to improved practice only if teachers receive support to struggle with these issues and to generate commitment to programs that they devise.